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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000929

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MOST IRAQI POLITICAL LEADERS CRITICIZE
ANNOUNCEMENT OF U.S. TALKS WITH IRAN

REF: A. (A) FBIS GMP 20060318538004

[1](#)B. (B) FBIS GMP 20060318564002

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani, responding to a request by SCIRI head Abdul Aziz Hakim, said Iran is ready to hold talks with the US on Iraq. Most - but not all - SCIRI leaders from the Shia Islamist Coalition were supportive of the talks with us in private. By contrast, Shia Islamists from the Sadr movement and from the Dawa and Fadhila parties feared the Iranians would insist that the US install a SCIRI-led government in return for concessions to the U.S. One Sunni Arab parliamentarian worried that the U.S. would make concessions to the Iranians on Iraq in return for Iranian concessions on the nuclear issue. Sunni Arab politicians urged that the U.S. consult Iraqis on the subject of negotiations before they occur. Kurdish President Talabani was publicly supportive but in private Kurdish leaders, who proposed discreet talks a few months ago, are neutral about the talks. They point out that Iran will attempt to use these talks to highlight their influence in the region. Yet, say the Kurds, the Iranians appear to have accepted limited talks on US terms, indicating Iranian concerns about the course of events in Iraq. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On March 16, Iraqi media reported that the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council

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Ali Laijani voiced readiness to hold talks with the US on Iraqi issues in response to a request made by SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Most Iraqi Arab leaders and interlocutors reacted with suspicion and termed such talks "interference" in Iraq's internal affairs.

MOST SCIRI LEADERS SUPPORT HAKIM'S CALL FOR TALKS

[1](#)3. (C) On March 19 Zuhair Humadi, Chief Advisor to Vice President Adil Mahdi (a top official from the SCIRI party) told PolOff that any conversation is better than none. Perhaps speaking on Iraqi issues can lead to speaking about Iran's nuclear program and that would be most beneficial to the US, he opined. Also on March 19, SCIRI Chief of Staff Haitham al-Husseini told PolOff that it is a good idea to reach out and start a dialogue. Badr Organization parliamentarian Iman Khalil Sha'lan al-Assadi rejected US-Iranian negotiations on Iraqi issues, however. She

told Poloff on March 19 that if the two countries want to talk about Iran's nuclear program and their bilateral relations, Iraq could have no objection. However, she fiercely argued that countries have to stop meddling in Iraq's affairs. (Assadi readily acknowledged that her position differs from that of SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim who first publicly proposed the talks.)

NON-SCIRI SHIA AND MODERATES UNIFORMLY AGAINST TALKS

¶4. (C) Other Shia political leaders condemned the proposed talks. Sadr coalition member Qusay Abd-al-Wahhab told al-Hayat newspaper on March 18 called them "a tacit recognition of Iranian interference through the Shia parties." Fearing that the Iranians will demand a SCIRI led government in return for concessions on nuclear issues, he said the talks would interfere in the formation of the government. Dawa's Kamal Abdullah Khallawi al-Saidi told Poloff on March 19 such talks are absolutely unacceptable. Hakim had no right to decide bilateral US-Iran policy decisions that involve Iraq on his own, he added. Nadim Jabiri's Islamic Virtue Party condemned the talks as interference in Iraq's internal affairs, according to Sharqiyah TV on March 18 (ref a). Shia Independent Qassim Daoud told PolOff on March 20 that he is hesitant about the US opening a dialogue with Iran on Iraq, because he doubts that the dialogue would lead to stopping Iran's interference in Iraq's affairs.

¶5. (C) Iraqi National List (Allawi's alliance) Safia Suhail predicted that these talks will not be helpful. On March 20, she told PolOff that only reason Abdul Aziz al-Hakim called for them was to upset the

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Sadrists. The List issued a statement saying that Iraq should take part in any discussions with Iran about Iraq, according to Sharqiyah TV on March 18.

SUNNIS WANT TO BE CONSULTED

¶6. (C) Sunni Tawaffuq Front issued a statement condemning the U.S.-Iran talks about Iraq, according to Sharqiyah TV on March 18. PolCouns talked to Tawaffuq leader Tarik al-Hashimi on the night of March 18 and told him the U.S. goal was to stop Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs. Hashimi accepted this goal but was dubious the talks would help. He told Poloff on March 20 that, not knowing exactly what will be discussed, he was still opposed to the talks. Poloff noted that the talks would aim to limit negative Iranian influence in Iraq. Hashimi responded that the Iraqis want to be informed about the subject for such negotiations and want to be consulted before they occur, he demanded. Adnan Dulaimi, responding to a question at a March 19 press conference with President Talabani, also expressed disapproval of US/Iran talks on Iraq. The Muslim Scholars issued a statement rejecting and denouncing the planned negotiations, according to their website on March 18 (ref b).

¶7. (C) Parliamentarian Ali as-Sajri ranted to PolCouns March 20 evening that the U.S. should beware making concessions to Iran on Iraq in return for seeking concessions from Iran on the nuclear issue. He predicted the Iranians would offer nothing substantial to the U.S. and that the American agreement to hold talks with Iran about Iraq signaled to the Iranians that the U.S. feels weak. PolCouns responded that the U.S. would not discuss any nuclear

issues in these talks; they would be limited to Iraq-specific issues. The U.S. would seek to limit Iranian interference in Iraq, an issue that Sunni Arabs ought to understand, he noted. Sejri agreed with the goal, but disagreed that talking to the Iranians is the best way to achieve it. He recommended sterner security measures against the Shia militias.

KURDS WARY BUT GENERALLY IN FAVOR OF IRAN TALKS

18. (C) President Talabani publicly welcomed the U.S.-Iran discussions at his press conference on March 18. However, in a telephone conversation on March 20, Presidency Council Chief of Staff Kamran Karadaghi told PolOff that the Kurds were officially neutral on the topic of U.S.-Iran talks about Iraq. Karadaghi reminded PolOff that President Talabani had originally raised the prospects of a quiet discussion between the Ambassador and the Iranians, but the Iranians had balked when the idea became public. Iran had also demanded at the time that the discussion be open to any topic. Karadaghi stated that while Talabani was in favor of the bilateral talks, both he and KDP leader Masud Barzani did not trust Tehran. According to Karadaghi, the Iranians are wily propagandists who would seek to use any bilateral talks with the U.S. as a sign of their own influence and power in Iraq. "In reality," Karadaghi sniffed, "their willingness to limit the talks to just Iraq issues, and also their acceptance of holding the talks in public signal Iran's fear that they are losing control in Iraq." Typically, Kurdish independent Mahmud Othman ignored the neutral statements by the Kurdish leadership and publicly condemned the talks with Iran, according to al-Hayat on March 18.

KHALILZAD